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SANTHA RAMA RAU AS A WOMEN NOVELIST

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Abstract

Santha Rama Rau experimented with the East and West culture, and she out look of the international front won her the glory of being a universal writer. A pioneer of Feminism, Santha Rama Rau belongs to the categories of writers who have gifted woman with an individual identity of their own. Her writings give a glimpse of the world.

Background of her work

Santha Rama Rau is the writer of a number of travelogues, short stories Auto-biographies and novels she is one of the finest Indian writers of English. Her Auto biographies are a fine blend of well-dramatized incidents, As a Novelist she has proud her competence in dealing with the form, style and techniques Santha Rama Rau is at her best when she is writing a novel. She enjoys the literacy she could that a Novelist employs in the depiction of events in a Novel. It is in her novels that Santha Rama Rau undertakes to explore her experiences far more deeply and subtly then she transforms her rich and varied experience of life into something more artistically enduring.

Santha Rama Rau is primarily as her output to date indicates a writer of travelogues. Out of her ten books published, Four are books on travel; East of India view to the South East, This is India and My Russian journey; Two her Autobiographies, home to India and gifts of passage, are also, in a sense, travelogues, and her two novels particularly, The Adventures could be considered travelogues in the grab of novels, remember the House and the Adventuress reveal that, even though she is a major writer of Fiction, she can, if she only wishes, easily transform a given materials into a work of art is put to wonderful use in her is passage to India, a play squeezed out Forest's novel.

Santha Rama Rau started writing at school under the loving guidance and encouragement of her parents and English Teachers she contributed, immensely to her school in London, Articles of her earliest short stories dealing with her child hood experiences – her experience at An Anglo-Indian day school in zoninabad and her experiences as a child in her mother's family home out side Allahabad are included in gifts of passage and they show remarkable powers of observations and an equally remarkable attitude of detachment. It is during her stay at wesllesly college in America. That she realized that she wanted to be a writer, and she wrote her first book, Home to India.

In 'Remember the House' which invites comparison with E.M Forester's 'On equal terms' The central character; Indira (Baba) is given the author's kind of background. High social states and education abroad and westernized circle of friends and relations and her moral publications and shifting values are most candidly portrayed.

In one of her short story 'who caresly' she had examined the attitudes of Foreign educated Indian towards their traditional values. In Remember the House Santha tries to hold a mirror to problem of shifting values in a changing society. She involved herself with Indian society and evolved a novel depicts the emergence of a new women.

Apparently, she made use of her Asian travel experiences in her second novel, The Adventuress. Her first novel deals with the cultural conflict in her home land ; India ; whereas in adventuress she modes and attempts to explore human values in the context of the cultural + us moil that the second world war brought fourth. Both her novels are focused on the great modern problems the women survival.

Santha Rama Rau indeed is one of the Indian writers who have revolutionized writing on the Feminist front. In her novel educated new women with economic independence and a search for identity.



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She plays the women's three fold role in the novel. She is a daughter, the mother and the most seductive, the consort from the theme of a conventional woman to that of the process the changes that have been going on in the society during the pre-Independence, era.

Santha Rama Rau presents India Goray as a passionate character. The struggle of and Indian women for her true identity clearly emerges in the novel. The Indian thoughts. Feelings and the realization of a woman from child hood to womanhood and her ultimate self realization Santha Rama Rau presents the example of the western educated female protagonists quest for her cultural roots.

The early stories, some of which are included in gifts of passage, reveal certain character is tics of Santha Rama Rau's personality. Firstly, She gives a description of her family her father, sir Bengal Rama Rau served as the Governor of the Reserve Bank and her mother immense social and medical work, she belongs to a highly sophisticated and deportment family secondly she writes about her education in Wellesley college American the two years i.e from 1939 to 1941 that she spend in India ay a young woman before going to jayan with her fathers where she met Faubion Bowers ; her life future husband . It is this part of her self and looked within . She could write a novel on her problem of identity, her own predicament, (Indian writers series a western educated Indian girl returning to India and encountering East and West between two sets of values. In the novel she freely explorer her natural and inner feelings.

Remember the House is the has had all her schooling in England and who, when the novel begins is bored with her life in India , The typical life of the rich snobbish, felt some how is appeal by this woves; she says like a American heroine, with 'the essential Home' inner trying to reach out of fulfillment, Santha Rama Rau's heroine moves towards wisdom and acceptance Santha Ram life and had centered around western life and families .The centre of the westernized circle of families to which Baba belongs is a reflection of Santha Rama Rau's own life and family.

The Autobiographical element in the Novel is highlighted towards the end of the novel when Indira beings to her roots.

The early stories, some of which are included in Gifts of Passage, reveal certain characteristics of Santha Rama Rau's narrative art. Firstly, she has a wonderful narrative style, classical in spirit, controlled, economical, adequate and perspicuous. Secondly, she has a superb sense of form which she manages with intelligence and tact. Thirdly, she is good at building up artistic superstructures on the solid basis of personal experience. It is this need of the basis of actual experience that turned her into a writer of travelogues or of 'autobiographies', with a thin line of division between them. After her first three books she must have felt confident about trying her hand at a bigger, more artistic, more complex form—the novel. Yes, but what about the material for it ? As most novelists do when they write their first novel, she turned to herself and looked within. Yes, she could write a novel on her own problem of identity, her own predicament : a West-educated Indian girl returning to India and encountering in herself the conflict between East and West, between two sets of values. It would be interesting to take a character like herself and explore her predicament in the context of Indian society and work out a kind of solution or compromise, opposite her own. The East-West encounter could be given an objective correlative in the form of actual foreigners—Americans, since she knew them well-arid it would be easier and quite effective if the story is told in the first person—easier, because the identification between herself and her heroine would be easy; effective, because the story would gain in authenticity; moreover she was used to writing in the. first person in her autobiography and travelogues. Yes, it would be a wonderful thing to do, particularly because in the novel she could be a little free from her natural stubborn reticence to speak about her inner self and also from the strict demands of fidelity to actual experience that she had obeyed in her autobiography-and travelogues. Again, her British publishers, if not the American ones, would certainly be interested in publishing a novel on the theme of East-West encounter, which writers like Forster and Kipling had made quite popular.

Remember the House is the story of Indira (or Baba) Gorary, who has had all her schooling in England and who, when the novel begins, is bored with her life in India, the typical life of the rich, snobbish, Westernised families of Bombay. T felt somehow trapped by this world,' she says, like a Lawrencian heroine, with 'the essential flame' in her, trying to reach out for fulfilment. Fulfilment, perhaps, is the wrong term to use with Santha Rama Rau's heroine, whose, development is more towards wisdom and acceptance, than towards fulfillment.



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The centre of the Westernised circle of families to which Baba belongs is Jay, a prince of Kalipur, with whose New Year's Eve party the novel begins. The dawn of India's independence is about to break, and 'Indian independence, only months away, was felt by most of us first as a sort of wariness about our pleasures, later as a political achievement' (p 9). At the self-consciously lavish party (because the age of Princes is about to end in a sort of anti-climax) of Jay's we meet most of the important characters of the novel: Pria Bhutt, Baba's best friend from the school days in England, 'simply the best looking girl in Bombay'; her fiancée, Karan Desai, a handsome but 'faceless' kind of young man whose entire destiny is to be the husband of Pria and give her children; Hati Joshi, Baba's childhood friend, who looks after his family property in Poona with a kind of hard-headed devotion, whom she is expected to marry one day; and an American couple, Alix, 'who is determined to love India', and her husband, Mr Nichols, a typical Yankee abroad.

The stage is set for some kind of East-West encounter, on the one hand, and for the protagonist's restless searching for roots, on the other. The group to which Baba belongs is highly Westernised, though each member of the group has in him his own proportion of Indianness and Westernisation. Jay, for instance, has had an English education, speaks immaculate English, visits England often, has English vices like gambling, horse-racing, and has adopted some English customs like giving Christmas and New Year's Eve parties. But he has kept his Indianness intact without bringing it into conflict with his Western 'self': he has a wife at Kalipur, to whom he is devoutly faithful, and a mistress in a beach house at Juhu to whom, too, he is equally faithful. His kind of Westernisation is symbolically presented in terms of the dinner that he gives: first the Western meal and then the Indian meal. Pria and Karan are essentially Indian, though Westernisation is an important 'possession' for them, a kind of exotic ornament to show off. It is only Joshi who mixes with this group without any damage to his independent, arrogant Mahratha identity. Though educated abroad, he is keen on looking after his ancestral property. He speaks English but in his own way, with a strong accent and the troubled r's and sharp t's of Mahrathi. The protagonist, Baba, the daughter of a rich, successful political lawyer, is Westernised by dint of her education in England, but she is uncertain about her identity. She is restless, bored with her group, looking forward to Indian freedom with vague expectancy. She is not sure whether she should marry Had, whom her family and friends have fixed as her future husband. There is 'an undefined situation' between them, which suggests the undefined nature of her personality. There is, one might say, a schism in her personality, which is reflected in the schism of her family. Her father is a famous political lawyer and a diehard nationalist, who has worked for India's independence in his own way. Though he is admired for his incisive intellect and driving nationalism, when independence comes, he is offered a 'mere advisory job. Her mother has virtually abandoned family life and has gone to stay near her Guru somewhere in Kerala. The only genuine Indian experience that Baba has cherished in her memory is her wonderfully secure, and exciting childhood that she spent at her grandmother's place in Jalnabad. The title, 'Remember the House' refers to this centre of her consciousness, which ultimately proves to be a living area where the roots clutch.

At the beginning of the novel, Baba is precariously poised between the West and the East, with more leaning towards the West. She makes friends with Alix, the American girl, and likes her for 'her frankness about herself, the openness of her demands', and her 'grasping for experience', which she, at first, thinks healthy:

"It was an appetite, the grasping for experience, this intimacy, this involvement with life. A big, healthy appetite, I thought. It was only much later that it seemed like greed." p. 60 (1)

A number of situations are presented bringing together the American couple and the Westernised Indians and the East-West encounter is explored in many of its dimensions: a race-course meeting, a shopping expedition, a trip to Poona, a visit to The Mahalaxmi temple, a beach party. It is at the beach party arranged by the Nichols that things reach a climax: While swimming Nicky kisses Baba and her reactions are all 'confused':

"In my room, before I went to sleep, I stared at myself in the mirror for a long time feeling that it was a dramatic moment, but could see no change" .p. 120 (2)

At the cocktail party later at the Nichols' °Baba wants to 'explore':

I said, 'Nicky, that day at the beach—' He looked at me for a second, smiling, 'It was fun, wasn't it? We must go to Juhu again soon.' 'But why? I mean, I don't understand.

Here, Baba's essential Indianness. Suddenly asserts itself.* She has unconsciously learnt in her childhood that happiness is something which is not to be pursued :



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In Jalnabad—no "one made much of a point about happiness...Our debt to the world would be defined, but the promises were all unstated. Within: our framework we would make our own happiness. It was never suggested that we pursue happiness. We were not encouraged to waste our time... (p. 98)

It is this 'sanskara' (cf. the title, 'Remember the House') which saves her. Alix, with her possessiveness, comes down upon Baba with her direct question, 'Has Nicky 64been making passes at you?' Poor Baba tries to explain the beach episode and assure her, 'It was nothing... I was drunk. He only kissed me because of you. He was angry with you and he had to do something.' Alix is ironical and bitter: 'It's India, you see. It betrays you... Poor Nicky...he is out of Iris depths. So am I. How will it end?' Baba asks, 'And "me"?' Alix says, 'You? But you're Indian.'

That makes Baba aware of her essential Indian identity—but at what cost?

When Hari proposes to her, she is still in her questioning mood: 'Why should we get married? Surely there should be something else? I think there should be more to. Life than just settling drawn. I wish I knew how to explain' IPna takes: her to task, 'Obviously you have been infected by these American friends of yours. You have begun to think .like a Westerner, and you've lost the chance of the best marriage you could have. The Nichols, like us, can only function within their own limits. Ours are different, though no less satisfactory. I expect you'll find out for yourself eventually' fpf 131-2). Pria, the wise, gets married to Karan and Baba decides to go South to see her mother.

In the second part, 'The South', Baba's perspective undergoes a change under the influence of a quiet, slow, typically Indian pace of life and that of her mother and grandmother, the Amma: of Jalnabad, who is the symbol of the Indian attitude to life.

At Chennur—the place in the South where her mother lives—she meets a school teacher called Krishnan, whose love of talk, delight in theory and complicated thought, intellectual curiosity and quiet, questioning attitude, attract her, and she falls, or thinks she falls, in love with him. But her one-sided romance is shattered when Krishnan comes to say good-bye to her on the eve of his departure to Madras for his vacation and says, 'I'm to be married.' Baba cries 'out helplessly, 'you never told me', to which he replies, 'Because I haven't thought much about it. It's all been arranged for such a long time' (p. 207). His voice has 'no breadth of guilt, only of shyness'. To Baba this is 'a queer experience. She cannot even weep, and this is a moment of growth—from adolescence to maturity. The monsoon breaks and Baba returns to Bombay wiser and soberer than she was when she left it. But Baba's education is not complete yet.

In Part Three, 'The Monsoon', she faces her father's death. Just before he dies he tells her : 'We have never understood each other. Your-nature, is full of things;., that are not inherited from either your mother or from me' (p. 225). Bereft of his wife's genuine love (because she 'painfully grasped peace and strength of not-loving, ;not-wanting, not really anything definable'), disillusioned with the new political forces in the country which put him on the back shelf, he dies an utterly lonely man. It is now that Baba realises her special predicament:-

“But I was gradually, formulating in, my mind something learned in Chen mi r that seemed to me to be a solid enough compensation. It would have comforted ., my father if I had been able to express it” p. 226 (3).

She thinks that at least she knows, now, how to live : 'I think I know the terms in which my life must be lived... and that is something'

The 15th of August brings freedom to India. Jay rings up Baba, 'I suppose the vultures have been gathering in great number' (p. 236). She goes to see him at his Juhu resort. She finds him completely drunk and his faithful mistress,

Sundribai, looking after him in a maternal way.

Baba wonders what she should do—should she take up a job ? or get married ? She thinks she can't start methodically to search for a husband. But Pria, who is now big with child (Baba is jealous 'of something so exclusive'), says, 'I don't know why not. Everybody does. Some people are sensible enough to admit—to themselves of course'. Baba's feeling is, 'So much has happened...I .fed I have changed'

Finally, she takes the initiative and asks Hari, who is fortunately still waiting, 'Hari, do you still want to marry me, because if you do I want to too.

“She confesses, 'I'm not in love with you, if that's what you mean—though I'm not sure what that means' . The novel ends with, of course, Hari's quiet acceptance of Baba as his wife. (4)



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“The central theme of the novel, as revealed by the foregoing analysis of it, is the education of Baba Goray which was left incomplete at the end of her schooling in England, the East-West theme being an integral part of the central theme”. (5).

Baba, with her bookish education in the West, is yet to learn a number of things about herself and the world, she is yet to discover her roots and define her identity and attain self-realisation, wisdom, and a proper perspective on life. It is but natural that the Western education and life in a London school has inculcated in her a love for Western values. Only a shocking experience will reveal to her that her real Indian sanskara, imbibed unconsciously during her childhood in her grandmother's house at Jalnabad, is still strong in her...Her experience with Nicky gives her a rude jolt and she realises the rock-bottom Indianness in herself. And this takes her to the other extreme : she is ready to fall into the arms of a young man who she thinks is a genuine Indian specimen.

She receives another shock—this time it is a milder one, because the shock is the result of her misconception of the Indian way of life—and realises that after all she is neither fully Indian nor fully Western, but what Santha Rama Rau herself realised in her own case (cf. Home to India) a 'real' Indian with a European education. And so she chooses to marry a man who is like herself, Westernised but having roots in the Indian culture. (Hari's roots are in agriculture and history, particularly the history of the Mahrathas.)

“Remember the House is essentially a psychological novel, dealing with the subtle maturing of an adolescent girl!”

But the psychology is presented not in terms of the development of consciousness as in Lawrence or Henry James but in terms of good dramatic situations, which are the creations of an extremely promising novelist. If only Santha Rama Rau had something of the attitude of Henry James or Forster or even Katherine Mansfield, she would have given a deeper psychological dimension to her theme. The two important sets of scenes dealing with the two crises—the Baba-Nicky-Alex scenes and Baba-Krishnan scenes—are done with such insight and grasp that one wonders why the same level is not maintained in other parts of the novel. Except these few scenes, the others are done with less 'pressure' and less rigorous manipulation. Sometimes the novel degenerates into travelogue-kind writing, giving some vivid descriptions of places for the sake of foreign readers. In the case of the characters, too, except the heroine and one or two characters, like Jay and Krishnan, all the other characters are flat: Pria, a foil to Baba, is there primarily to discuss certain problems of Baba's and to take her to task for her deviations; the grandmother's function is to enact the symbol of Indian culture, giving lectures on marriage and love; the mother who lives away from her husband ('I had to leave. I had my own enemies—in myself... I was unskilled. I had to work with a teacher' p. 212), is incomprehensible—such an important and unusual kind of married relationship is not given any flesh and blood. The whole conception and execution of the novel indicates that Santha Rama Rau concentrates only on the central character and one or two thematic strands and does not live up to all the possibilities of her plot and characters.' . . .

The theme of East-West encounter, which is an integral part of the central theme, is the one theme which comes off successfully. The theme is explored on two levels : one, the psychological level, on which the conflict in Baba's mind—the conflict between the internalised West and internalised East—takes place; two, on the level of external interaction between Indians and Americans, i.e., primarily between Baba and Alix and Nicky. Baba's internal conflict and its resolution has been dealt with already. The external encounter, which of course is organically related to Baba's internal conflict (because the external encounter helps the internal conflict to move towards partial resolution), is perhaps the only thing in the novel which, has a ring of authenticity. The triangular relationship between Baba, Alix and Nicky is designed to show that just as the East cannot emulate the West, the West too gets exposed in its interaction with the East. Santha Rama Rau is at her best in presenting the triangular interactions with real insight and control. It is classical art at its best, triumphantly combining complexity of experience with, subtlety of presentation. It is in these chapters that the first person narrative technique is fully and justifiably exploited.. At the beach party, for instance, after Nicky kisses Baba, her experience is superbly narrated

All that day I carried a certain atmosphere with me, hard to describe- but quickly communicated to people I was with... All this, I thought, for a kiss, the power that one has or can generate.

In my room, before I went to sleep, I stared at myself in the mirror for a long time, feeling that it was-a dramatic moment, 'but Could see no change.'



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The cocktail party at the Nichols is also well done with the tensions presented with genuine dramatic suspense. It is at the end of this scene that Alix is' fully exposed and this coincides with ^Baba's intense realisation of her essential Indian identity.

The structure of the novel is simple, yet effective and artistically satisfying. Baba, restless and bored with her group, goes to the American s for some kind of fulfilment. Disillusioned and shocked into wisdom and realisation, she, like a pendulum, goes to the other extreme and falls in love with a specimen of Indian manhood. Feeling rejected and disappointed, she attains "a fuller realisation and accepts Hari, who has been conveniently and patiently waiting for her. In this main framework there are parallel and contrasting episodes beautifully woven into it. As a contrast to "the main story, we have Pria, the sensible friend of Baba, who is engaged to' Karan right at the beginning of the novel, gets married when Baba's predicament reaches a climax and is pregnant when Baba's problem is resolved and she gets engaged. The novel thus begins with one engagement and ends-with another engagement. On the political level., the novel begins with the news of the coming independence and ends with the announcement of freedom. But ironically enough Mr Goray, who has fought for this freedom, is a disillusioned man in the novel and at the end of the novel he dies a lonely and broken man. Jay suffers a different kind of disillusionment Owing to the political turn of events which is to give the princes a raw deal. At the beginning of the novel Jay is desperately gay, but at the end he is completely deflated. If we take all the episodes into consideration, we find that the key-theme is disillusionment. For Jay and Mr Goray the disillusionment is tragic, ' whereas for Baba it has a creative aspect—the attainment of wisdom.

For comic relief, Santha Rama Rau introduces two characters, one in part I and the other in part II—Maha-rani of Kalipur and the principal of the school at Chen-nur respectively. If the Maharani, who is fond of talking to foreigners, and who, in the end, gets hysterical because of the merger of her state and runs away to Europe with jewellery worth a million dollars, provides what might be called comedy of manners, the principal provides linguistic humour (he is a comic variation of East-West theme) with his 'half-singing words'—'You live in Bangalore, isn't it?'; 'Easily arranged. Do not trouble'; 'You are itself kindness'; 'You sing no doubt also?' said in heavy Southern accents and with his absurd farewell speech loaded with quotations like 'parting is such sweet sorrow', 'footprints in the sands of time'.

The total structure consisting of three parts, 'The Season', 'The South' and 'The Monsoon', is obviously built on the dialectical principle of thesis, antithesis and .In thesis. The geographical titles are obviously symbolical, the last 'The Monsoon' signifying the coming of life-giving rains and the beginning of regeneration, new vegetation and new life.

The East-West theme, the dialectical structure remind one inevitably of E.M. Forster. The comparison, however, highlights the limitations of Santha Rama Rau. She suffers from too rigid a sense of form and from too self-conscious artistry which do not allow her imagination to put on its wings. She is not incapable of creating dimensions of life, but she prefers to work within the limits of her art, rather within the limits of her conscious knowledge of her art. She is a victim of her classical temper, in that she has produced a competent work of art without the enlivening touch of genius. Forster, to whom she is compared by some of the reviewers, too, works within the limits of his art, but the exuberance of his imagination and the depth and variety of his concerns are so great that it was absolutely necessary for him to control them by a supremely conscious artistry. A Passage, to India is a multidimensional novel held together by a rare kind of artistry. But Santha Rama Rau's creativity is too timid to transcend the confines of her art-consciousness and, therefore, she has to be content with a limited kind of achievement.

30th the novels together make, one might say, a fine achievement carving a niche of their own in the area of Indian fiction in English, a little below the four great pinnacles, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayana, Manohar Malgonkar and Mulk Raj Anand. She is definitely with writers like Kamala Markandaya, B. Rajan, Nayantara Sahgal and would require a deeper involvement in life than her 'gypsy' life affords, and a greater devotion to the novel from than she has time to give.

Reference

1. Santha Rama Rau's "Remembers the House" p. 60.
2. Remember the House by Santha Rama Rau's p. 140
3. Santha Rama Rau's Novel Remembers the House p.226.



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4. The East-West Theme in the novel is perceptively analysed in Meenakshi Mukherjee's *The Twice Born Fiction*, Heinemann, New Delhi, 1971.
5. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar makes the right comments on the novel's theme: 'Remember the House ring true, because she writers of things well within the range of her experience. Childhood and girlhood at Jalnabad are recapitulated with sensitiveness... One outgrows one's childhood and inevitably life makes its demands on the narrator-heroine, Baba.' *Indian Writing in English, Asia*, 1973, pp. 471-2.
6. Santha Rama Rau's *Novel The adventures* p. 140.